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ABSTRACT

This report provides an overview of the phenomenon of early school leaving through presentation and discussion of relevant research issues, concerns, and retention strategies for potential leavers. It includes a brief review of the current literature with an emphasis on Canadian and Saskatchewan research. The extent of the early school leaving problem and its effect on dropouts' lives, the economy, and society are examined. Issues involved with early school leaving rates, in particular, the need for accurate data collection and for a uniform definition for dropout/early school leaver, are addressed. The characteristics of the early school leaver (family/background, personal, and school-related) are explored and the dropout's reasons for leaving school before completing grade 12 are discussed. Characteristics of effective dropout prevention strategies are identified, along with some Saskatchewan initiatives in regard to dropout prevention and re-entry. The report concludes by offering suggestions and recommendations to encourage student retention in Saskatchewan. A bibliography of 187 citations is included. (NB)

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SASKATCHEWAN INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT & RESEARCH UNIT

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EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS: CURRENT ISSUES AND CONCERNS

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June 1989

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EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS: CURRENT ISSUES AND CONCERNS

**Prepared for the
Saskatchewan Instructional Development
and Research Unit**

**With Funding from
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**by
Marilyn H. Macdonald, M.Ed.
June 1989**

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INTRODUCTION

In a society in which education is highly valued as the key to one's personal advancement and society's total growth, it is a curious and sad paradox that one out of three students in Saskatchewan who start first grade will leave school before completing Grade 12 (Cipywnyk, Pawlovich, & Randhawa, 1983). Like other complex issues, dropping out of school does not occur in isolation but rather it is a problem woven into the fabric of the nation's and community's economic and social life. Thus, the problem cannot be viewed as a distinct and separate issue.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the phenomenon of early school leaving through presentation and discussion of relevant research issues, concerns, and retention strategies for potential leavers. Re-entry and post-leaving opportunities will also be reviewed.

Specifically, this report will deal with the following topics and areas:

1. A brief review of current literature with emphasis on Canadian and Saskatchewan research;
2. The extent of the early school leaving problem and its effect on dropouts' lives, the economy, and society;
3. Issues involved with early school leaving rates — accurate data collection and the need for a uniform definition for dropout/early school leaver;
4. The characteristics of the early school leaver — family/background, personal, and school-related;
5. The reasons for leaving school before completing Grade 12;
6. The characteristics of effective dropout prevention strategies;
7. Identification of some Saskatchewan initiatives in regard to dropout prevention and re-entry; and
8. Suggestions/recommendations to encourage student retention in Saskatchewan.

In the interest of producing a report suitable for broad circulation within the educational and public community, brevity was opted for in the writing rather than the extensive elaboration that a more academically-oriented document would require. The following information and discussion of issues pertaining to early school leavers are presented in the hope that they will contribute to the ongoing development of student retention policies and programs in Saskatchewan.

EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

Early School Leaving Rates

A Saskatchewan Education study, based on school leavers Grades 8 to 12, found a 31 percent attrition rate overall. In this study, early school leavers' dropout rates for students from rural schools were observed to peak at 11.94 percent in Grade 10, with a Grade 8 rate of 1.34 percent and a Grade 12 rate of 8.45 percent (Cipywnyk et al., 1983).

In comparison, dropout rates for students from Saskatchewan urban schools showed a systematic increase starting at 0.95 percent for Grade 8 and reaching a peak of 14.29 percent for Grade 12. This monotonically increasing trend was also observed when all the Saskatchewan students were considered together by grade. For example, the Grade 8 rate was 1.15 percent and the Grade 12 rate was 11.93 percent.

The overall Saskatchewan cumulative dropout rate of 31.33 percent indicates that if one starts with 100 Grade 8 students, it can be expected that 31 of these students will leave school before Grade 12 graduation. The highest cumulative dropout rate, 38.8 percent, was obtained for males from rural schools.

Canadian studies have yielded similar attrition rates. Statistics Canada (1973, 1975) reported a 29.5 percent rate of early school leaving for Canadian youth. The Ontario dropout rate is estimated at 31 to 33 percent (Radwanski, 1987).

In the United States, there are approximately 1.1 million 16- to 19-year-olds who are not currently enrolled in school. It is estimated that more than 25 percent of potential American graduates have left school before Grade 12 completion (Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1979). Little progress has been made in reducing the overall dropout rate since 1965 (Grant & Eiden, 1982). In particular, large urban centres such as New York, Chicago, and Los

Angeles have reported dropout rates as high as 50 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1985).

Social and Economic Losses

Leaving school early constitutes an individual, social, and economic problem.

The civic and economic welfare of the nation is dependent on a universally high level of educational attainment. Thus, for the benefit of both individuals and society, it is assumed that youth should remain in school until high school graduation. (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, p. 374)

When comparing lifetime earnings of high school graduates and dropouts, the loss in adjusted lifetime earnings for the dropouts is \$215,000. For male dropouts, the loss is estimated to be \$260,000; for females, \$170,000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1983b). The U.S. Bureau of the Census reports that, in 1982, early school leavers, both male and female, 25 years old (and older), earned about one third less than those who graduated from high school.

In a recent U.S. study (Catterall, 1985), it was estimated that each dropout costs society a *minimum* of \$60,000 during his or her worklife. The Appalachian Regional Commission estimates that dropouts will earn \$237 billion less over their lifetimes than will high school graduates. Thus, state and local governments will collect \$71 billion less in taxes (Research Triangle Institute, 1985). Similar projections for Canada (adjusted for population difference) would not be unreasonable as this country experiences approximately the same dropout rates. For both nations, the cumulative costs of dropping out reach into the billions in the form of lost tax revenues, welfare and unemployment expenditures, adult education, business (re)training courses, and crime prevention funds.

Futurists warn also of the broad economic losses that are attributable to diminished productivity because of the shortage of skilled workers. Justiz & Kameen (1986) observed that, in the near future, the service sector of the economy will account for 75 percent of all new jobs to be created in the next decade. These authors express justifiable concern that there will not be a shortage of jobs but of skilled workers. Even lower skill level jobs will require higher education levels. Rumberger (1987) observes that, in the future, the relative disadvantage of leaving school early will be even greater than today. The skill requirements of many jobs will be altered because of increased use of new technologies. Without a sound basic education, dropouts will be less able to adapt and learn new skills (National Academy of Sciences, 1984) and thus will become less employable.

Unemployment and the Early School Leaver

Those with little formal education and limited work experience are usually among the last hired as employment opportunities arise. Of the 50,000 unemployed in Saskatchewan in March, 1988, approximately 33 percent (16,000) were in the 15- to 24-year-old category. The Saskatchewan unemployment rate for 15- to 19-year-olds has consistently been the highest of all age groups (Statistics Canada, 1987). It seems reasonable to assume that those students who leave school early in Saskatchewan will have great difficulty obtaining a job. The U.S. Bureau of the Census data has provided further justification for the concern about dropouts. In 1981, 36 percent of high school dropouts were unemployed compared to 21 percent of high school graduates not in college.

Previously the labor market was able to absorb most of those with a limited education, but increasingly the lack of a high school diploma is tantamount to a denial of employment. In order to be employable in other than the most menial work, those entering the labor market will certainly have to master the core competencies that should be acquired in high school (Berlin & Duhl, 1984; National Academy of Sciences, 1984).

How Dropouts Fare After Leaving School

After leaving school, dropouts report they feel that they have more control over their lives, are more responsible, experience an increase of self-esteem (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986) and report that they plan to further their education (Ekstrom et al., 1986). Peng (1985) observes that, of those male dropouts who do find a job, dropouts receive only slightly less remuneration than do the high school graduates. As previously noted, however, these positive experiences, unfortunately, are short lived. The economic, social, and psychological deficits collected cumulatively after one drops out of high school suggest that, even if dropouts have some initial income or psychological advantage over their graduate peers, this advantage is lost by the time they are 25 years old (Peng, 1985; Weidman & Friedman, 1984).

Of the over 2,000 dropouts interviewed two years after leaving school in *The High School and Beyond Study* (1980-1982), over half felt that leaving was a bad decision (National Center for Education Statistics, 1983). It is interesting to note that in the Saskatchewan early school leavers' study (Cipywnyk et al., 1983), 97.1 percent of the leavers interviewed stated they would not recommend that others leave school as early as they did.

Background/Family Influences and the Early School Leaver

The adverse effects of dropping out of school may pass from one generation to another. Dropouts are less likely than high school graduates to provide favorable economic and educational opportunities for their children (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Peng, 1985). This finding is similar to those of other Canadian studies reported in the literature (Archer, 1978; Larter & Eason, 1978; Radwanski, 1987). Saskatchewan studies have also found that the majority of early school leavers' parents are not high school graduates (Cipywnyk et al., 1983; Macdonald, 1987).

The significant influence of family background suggests that the tendency to drop out begins early in a student's life. Attempts to combat the problem should, therefore, be initiated at an early age as well. Compensating education programs, designed to overcome the initial disadvantages associated with disadvantaged social origins, should be strengthened, although they may not completely equalize educational opportunity (Levin, 1986).

Summary

In view of the magnitude of the dropout problem and the costs to both the individual school leaver and society, the phenomenon of early school leaving is worthy of careful scrutiny. The dimensions of the educational, social, and economic concerns are succinctly outlined by Steinberg, Blinde, and Chan (1984):

It is well documented that dropping out of high school is associated with an array of individual and social costs. For the individual, failure to complete high school is associated with limited occupational and economic prospects, disenfranchisement from society and its institutions, and substantial loss of personal income over his or her lifetime. For society, premature school-leaving is associated with increased expenditures for government assistance to individuals and families, higher rates of crime, and maintenance of costly programs for purposes such as employment and training. (p. 113)

Natriello, Pallas, and McDill (1986), in their comprehensive article on school leavers, discuss the individual and collective disadvantages that accrue when a significant portion of students leave school before completing Grade 12. These disadvantages, they state, "are impossible to ignore, particularly in a society committed to equality of opportunity and to the full participation of all citizens in political, social, and economic affairs" (p. 430).

There is continued and justifiable concern for the significant number of young people who choose to leave high school before graduation despite the bleak consequences and hapless prospects that await them.

NEED FOR ACCURATE DROPOUT DATA

Most social initiatives build on a foundation of accurate, verifiable data. Unfortunately, data are lacking in relation to accurate dropout statistics. Two particular areas of concern in relation to the collection of accurate statistics will be dealt with: the lack of a centralized data base on dropouts and the lack of a uniform definition of dropouts/early school leavers.

American studies done at a national level have yielded overall dropout rates in local school districts and individual schools; however, the data are deficient (Cooke, Ginsberg, & Smith, 1985; Hahn, Danzberger, & Lefkowitz, 1987; Hammack, 1986; Morrow, 1986). Similarly, Canadian studies have only estimated the actual number of early school leavers nationally (Statistics Canada, 1973, 1975). Provincial researchers in Ontario and Saskatchewan have observed that the quality of available statistics regarding the dropout rate leaves much to be desired (Cipywnyk et al., 1983; Macdonald, 1987; Radwanski, 1987).

It appears that while technology is capable of generating such information, there is a lack of a national and provincial centralized statistical data base tracking students through their school years. Considering the transiency of our population and the diversity of schooling/programs available, such a data base would prove to be invaluable for compilation of attrition rates. In view of the demographic and geographic differences within and among the schools/school divisions and dropout populations, it would seem essential that educational personnel have access to specific, consistent data relating to dropout rates in order to fully address school and district budgeting issues, policy and program planning, dropout prevention strategies, personnel distribution, and student funding allocation.

Need for Provincial Coordination

In Saskatchewan, it is mandatory that each school division appoint a local attendance officer. To aid school officials and attendance officers in tracking students and to monitor the retention rate of schools, a provincial attendance officer could be appointed to assist boards of education in maintaining accurate school attendance records. These data would provide a provincial (and local)

overview of dropout rates in Saskatchewan. Access to this service could facilitate decisions involving school attrition and dropout issues at local/provincial levels as well as aid in the informed investment of resources, whether it be in the form of money, personnel, or program development.

A Uniform Definition for Dropouts/Early School Leavers

A prerequisite for the collection of accurate statistics is the adoption of a uniform definition of dropout (or early school leaver). The term *dropout* has been used to designate a variety of early school leavers: (a) pushouts — undesirable students; (b) disaffiliates — students no longer wishing to be associated with the schools; (c) educational mortalities — students failing to complete a program; (d) capable dropouts — family socialization not agreeing with school demands (Elliott, Voss, & Wendling, 1966); and (e) stopouts — dropouts who return to school, usually within the same academic year.

The Current Population Survey used by the U.S. Government Accounting Office defines dropouts as "persons neither enrolled in schools nor high school graduates." In other words, if you are not in school and you have not graduated from Grade 12, you are a dropout (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1983-84, p. 45).

Radwanski's (1987) study on the relevance of education and the issue of dropouts in Ontario uses this definition of dropout: "Any student who leaves school before having obtained his or her Grade 12 diploma" (p. 67).

The 1983 Saskatchewan study of early school leavers by Cipywnyk et al. utilized this research definition from Reich and Young (1975):

A pupil who leaves school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of study without transferring to another school. The term early school leaver is used to designate those secondary school pupils who withdrew from Public Secondary school membership within the last two years and who were deficient at least one year or eight classes of grade twelve completion. Such an individual will be considered an early school leaver whether his leaving occurs during or between regular school terms, whether his leaving occurs before or after he has passed the compulsory school attendance ages, and, where applicable, whether or not he has completed a minimum required amount of school work.

Further definitions of dropouts are suggested by Good (1973), Morrow (1986), and many others.

Definitions for early school leavers appear to be as varied and diversified as the leavers themselves. Phi Delta Kappa's Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research tried to derive a consensus definition of dropping out and concluded:

We simply cannot agree what a dropout is. In some districts, death, marriage, taking a job, entering the armed forces, entering college early, being expelled or jailed, going to a deaf school, business school, or vocational school causes one to be considered a dropout. In another district none of these acts would be considered ...

There are at least as many different definitions of a dropout as there are school districts recording dropouts. Some districts solved their problem of who to count as a dropout by not using any definition at all, whereas other districts had three or four definitions, and neither we nor they seemed to know which one was used. (Barber, 1985, pp. 7-8)

Summary

In order to compile accurate statistics concerning the extent of the early school leaver population, a definition should be adopted that would be utilized provincially (and nationally, if possible). Until a uniform provincial system of calculating the dropout rate is developed and adopted in practice by local school systems, dropout prevention efforts will be hampered by lack of specific knowledge about district and individual school dropout rates.

Morrow (1986) and Hammack (1986) agree that lack of a uniform definition for dropouts and consequent problems with the validity, reliability, and comparability of available data are hindering policy makers' and government officials' understanding of the nature and scope of the early school leaving phenomenon.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

The act of dropping out, which is an individual decision, is rarely the result of a simple factor; rather, it is the result of complex interactions of a number of factors that culminate in the decision to leave school. While there is no archetypal dropout, the literature is replete with reported characteristics related to the

leaver's family/background, personality or psychosocial behavior, and school/academic factors.

A number of general predictors identified in the literature may permit early identification of the potential early school leaver. Most, but not all, early school leavers exhibit a number of the characteristics/behaviors outlined below.

Major longitudinal studies in the United States (Bachman et al., 1971; Borus, Crowley, Rumberger, Santos, & Shapiro, 1980; Boyer, 1983; Brookover, Erickson, & Joiner, 1967; Brookover, Lepere, Hamachek, Thomas, & Erickson, 1965; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Pallas, 1986; Peng & Taikai, 1983; Rumberger, 1983, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986) have yielded data which allows a profile of the early school leaver to emerge. While this list of characteristics is by no means exhaustive, it provides a clearer picture of the family, personal, and school correlates of early school leaving.

Family/Background Characteristics

- Low socioeconomic status;
- Single parent families/broken homes;
- Parent(s) who are early school leavers;
- Larger than average family size; and
- Weak support for educational/occupational aspirations or endeavors (i.e., fewer study aids in home; little encouragement, etc.).

Valentine's (1980) study and other studies (Bachman et al., 1971; Cervantes, 1965; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Zamanzadeh, 1975), including a Saskatchewan study (Cipywnyk et al., 1983), confirmed that parental influence (or an effective support system) was of primary importance in the level of educational attainment and school persistence of the student.

Canadian studies have reported similar findings regarding family and background of dropouts (Archer, 1978; King, 1985; Larter & Eason, 1978; Radwanski, 1987; Reich & Young, 1975; Watson, 1975). Zamanzadeh's (1975) Montreal study identified a group of dropouts who differed only marginally from the persisters. It was suggested that, in these cases, dropping out may have been prevented by such influences as a new supportive peer group, an interested teacher, or warm understanding parents.

Saskatchewan dropouts are more likely to come from larger low socioeconomic status families and have parents who were early school leavers (Cipywnyk et al., 1983; Macdonald, 1987; Pawlovich, 1985). The Saskatchewan research of Cipywnyk et al. (1983), in contrast to the majority of studies, found that their sample of leavers (54.3 percent) valued education but felt they could no longer cope. Also, the parents of these leavers had expressed a desire for their children to stay in school. It may be that, although parents tried to dissuade their children from leaving school early and seemed to associate future success with the importance of completing education, the "hidden curriculum" in the home may not have been supportive of school achievement.

Personal Characteristics

- Low self-esteem;
- Low sociability, social maturity;
- External locus of control (controlled by external forces, i.e., dislike of a subject or teacher, peer pressure);
- Low educational/occupational aspirations;
- Low degree of extracurricular participation;
- Delinquent behaviors;
- More likely to have friends who are also alienated from school;
- Likely to be of minority ethnic origin;
- More likely to have a part-time job in excess of 20 hours per week;
- More males than females leave school; and
- Pregnant and/or early marriage.

Canadian studies have generally reported similar findings relating to personal characteristics (Archer, 1978; King, 1985; Radwanski, 1987; Reich & Young, 1975; Roosa, 1985; Zamanzadeh & Prince, 1978), with some exceptions noted below.

Other somewhat contradictory studies such as the Saskatchewan research study (Cipywnyk et al., 1983) also found that over 80 percent of the leaver sample got along well with their peers. Also, approximately 46 percent of the leavers

interviewed in Ontario (Goldfarb Consultants, 1987) felt their high school experience was excellent.

Saskatchewan research differs from the majority of studies on early school leavers regarding extracurricular participation. Cipywnyk et al. (1983) and Macdonald (1987) reported that over 50 percent of their leavers participated in extracurricular activities, mainly sports. (However, in some of the schools, this participation was at noon or compulsory.)

Although ethnicity/minority group membership is *not* considered a characteristic of early school leavers in Canada, certain geographical or community exceptions require special consideration. For instance, a 1984 study by the Northern Alberta Development Council reported that for Native youth in northern Alberta the dropout rate was alarmingly high. Since this study was provincial in scope, the results may be generalizable to other provinces with locales of substantial Native population.

The study by Saskatchewan Education's Community Education Branch (1983) revealed a 93.7 percent dropout rate for Native youth (Grades 6 to 12) in Regina. Despite recent initiatives and improvements in Native education, such as hiring Native teachers and encouraging parental involvement, it is clear that Native student retention rates deserve continued attention.

Schools have generally been unsuccessful in helping young women to finish high school once they become pregnant (Zellman, 1981). In a paper presented to the Society for Research on Child Development in Toronto, Roosa (1985, April) argued that school failure or dropping out may precede pregnancy for a significant portion (40 to 50 percent) of female leavers. He contends that this group is the least well served by existing school programs. Approximately 40 percent of American young women return to school in later life for a high school equivalency diploma (Chilman, 1980), but the disruption and/or end of formal education takes its toll because pregnant teenagers frequently do not complete their education using alternative programs (Mott & Marsiglio, 1985). Becoming pregnant typically has a disruptive effect on educational progress which, in turn, has a serious impact on vocation and income (Simkins, 1984).

At present, there are only three facilities in Saskatchewan that accommodate the educational needs of pregnant adolescents of school age. Since 95 percent of these females keep their babies (Saskatchewan Social Services, 1987), it would appear that increased numbers of child care facilities, teachers, and counsellors are required to service this population.

Certain delinquent behaviors and attitudes that are characteristic of alcohol, drug, and tobacco users are shared by early school leavers (Friedman, 1985; Wehlage, 1986). These behaviors for Grade 10 (age 15) Canadian adolescents include:

- Spending less time doing homework and studying;
- Having negative attitudes towards authority and school; and
- Having lower self-esteem (and poorer mental health) (King, Robertson, & Warren, 1985).

The Saskatchewan study of early school leavers found that the most common activities of early school leavers spending time together were drinking alcohol and/or taking drugs, going for coffee, driving around, partying, and engaging in sports activities (Clpywnyk et al., 1983, p. 118). In view of these behaviors, promotion of drug and alcohol awareness and education programs in the school and community should be part of the integrated approach to dealing with the early school leaving problem (Wehlage, 1986).

School-Related Characteristics

- High absenteeism/in-school truancy ("cutting classes"); tardiness;
- High alienation from school; negative attitude towards school;
- Higher incidence of discipline problems than stay-ins;
- Dissatisfaction with school;
- Low academic self-concept;
- Low educational aspirations;
- Low ability level, particularly in reading and mathematics;
- Low academic achievement; low grade point average;
- Low standardized test scores;
- Failure in academic subjects;
- Enrollment in vocational/general/basic course(s);

- Overage for grade level, having failed one grade (or more);
- Less likely to consult with teachers, counsellors, parents about school issues (or leaving school); and
- Tendency to drop out in Grade 10.

See Figure 1 for summary of characteristics of the early school leaver. Similar findings have been reported for Canadian and Saskatchewan leavers (Archer, 1978; Cipywnyk et al., 1983; King, 1978; Radwanski, 1987; Reich & Young, 1975; Watson, 1975).

Intellectual Ability and Sex Differences

Not all leavers fit the profiles outlined above. This is particularly true of intellectually capable and, to a lesser extent, female leavers.

Intellectual Ability and the Early School Leaver

One of the most frequently assumed explanations for the staggering number of early school leavers is that those who drop out cannot benefit from educational experiences any longer. The fact is that over 40 percent of those Canadian youth who drop out have at least average intellectual ability (Durward & Ellis, 1971; Radwanski, 1987). With remediation, or effective initial teaching of basic skills, a greater proportion of those students should have been able to complete their high school education.

The general conclusion of the American studies done prior to 1965 (Bowman & Matthews, 1960; Cervantes, 1965; Hohol, 1955; Lichter, Raplen, Siebert, & Sklansky, 1962; Schreiber, 1966) was that high school graduates had higher intellectual ability than leavers, but the reported findings were not consistent. Stevens (1965) concluded that the results of his review on U.S. dropouts were disturbing:

It seems that many of the youths who drop out of school have the intellectual ability to stay in the high school educational program. Even a majority of those who are low in intelligence are not so low that they cannot complete the required work. (p. 13)

Bachman et al. (1971) found that boys who left school early tended to score below average on intelligence tests and tests of academic ability. However, the difference in ability was not really very large (about the equivalent of five IQ points on the average) between early school leavers and those who completed high

Figure 1

Summary of characteristics of the early school leaver

Family/Background Characteristics

- Low socioeconomic status
- Single parent families/broken homes
- Parent(s) who are early school leavers
- Larger than average family size
- Weak support for educational/occupational aspirations or endeavors (i.e., fewer study aids in the home, little encouragement, etc.)

Personal Characteristics

- Low self-esteem
- Low sociability, social maturity
- External locus of control, (controlled by external forces, i.e., dislike of a subject or teacher, peer pressure)
- Low educational/occupational aspirations
- Low degree of extracurricular participation
- Delinquent behaviors
- More likely to have friends who are also alienated from school
- Likely to be of minority ethnic origin
- More likely to have a part-time job in excess of 20 hours per week
- More males than females leave school
- Pregnant and/or early marriage

School-Related Characteristics

- High absenteeism/in-school truancy ("cutting classes"), tardiness
- High alienation from school, negative attitude towards school
- Higher incidence of discipline problems than stay-ins
- Dissatisfaction with school
- Low academic self-concept
- Low educational aspirations
- Low ability level, particularly in reading and mathematics
- Low academic achievement, low grade-point average
- Low standardized test scores
- Failure in academic subjects
- Enrollment in vocational/general/basic course(s)
- Overage for grade level; having failed one grade (or more)
- Less likely to consult with teachers, counsellors, parents about school issues (or leaving school)
- Tendency to drop out in Grade 10

school but did not go on to college. Much larger differences were observed between those boys who later went to college and all those who did not.

In a comprehensive review of dropout literature, Lindgren (1980) noted that an uncomfortably high proportion (18 percent) of school leavers have above average to superior aptitude. It is interesting to note that Lajoie and Shore (1981) found that 19 percent of their dropout sample were gifted. Sewell, Palmo, and Manni's (1981) American study of 65 dropouts enrolled in a career awareness program highlighted the fact that an undetermined number of dropouts were intellectually capable of performing at an average or above average level academically. Other studies have corroborated these findings (Elliott et al., 1966; Gerlach & Richardson, 1980; Hathaway, Reynolds, & Monachesi, 1969; LeCompte & Goebel, 1987).

A number of Canadian studies have reported data on the intelligence or academic ability of the leavers in their sample. Sharp and Kristjanson (1965) found that the intelligence scores of leavers in Manitoba two decades ago indicated that 59 percent of the leavers in Manitoba had the ability to complete the high school program (over 90 IQ) but left school early.

In a Halifax study (Walker, 1980), the ability levels of school withdrawals were distributed in a very similar manner for IQ scores of 90 and above (59.6 percent): 90 to 110 – 45.8 percent; 110 to 120 – 10.1 percent; 120 to 140 – 3.7 percent. The proportion for 90 and below, however, was 18.7 percent compared to 41.0 percent in the Sharp and Kristjanson (1965) study. The remaining percentage scores (21.7 percent) were unavailable.

In a Vancouver study, Durward and Ellis (1971) found that 52.8 percent of the early school leavers had poor achievement ratings — D or F standings; however, the leavers with C achievement level rating or above constituted 37.6 percent (1969), 42.9 percent (1970), and 41.2 percent (1971) of the early school leavers in the years indicated. These percentages indicate that a substantial proportion of the students who left early had the ability to complete their high school courses.

In a recent Saskatchewan study involving 40 pairs of leavers and persisters matched for intellectual ability and sex, Macdonald (1987) found that leavers had significantly lower grade point averages and academic self-concepts and were significantly more alienated from school than were the persisters (those who had the *same* ability but *stayed* in school). Evidently, the personal and school-alienation factors played an important part in the school-leaving process for these leavers.

Undoubtedly, intelligence must be recognized as a potent factor in achievement (Hahn, 1987). However, the discrepancy between the intellectual potential and the poor achievement among the dropouts suggests that:

If academic failure which restricts promotion and increases alienation from school is a major factor in early school leaving, factors other than IQ, such as achievement motivation ... and the institutional impact of the school must be further explored to identify the possible reasons for academic failure. (Sewell et al., 1981, p. 73)

Low academic achievement at the high school level is a highly complex problem. Although, in the early grades school performance is affected by motivation, self-concept, and background characteristics, these intervening variables seem to take on a far greater significance when the student reaches adolescence.

Male and Female Early School Leavers

It has been consistently found that more males than females leave school early. In the Saskatchewan early school leavers' study, a disproportionately high percentage of male dropouts was identified, particularly in rural areas (Cipywnyk et al., 1983). This finding seems to be consistent with research on school climates and learning environments, which indicates that females generally are more positive toward the school climate and learning environment than males (Anderson, 1982). Female leavers tended to be more pleased/satisfied with school and had fewer disciplinary problems than the male leavers (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). O'Malley and Bachman (1976) and Poole and Low (1982) also found different achievement patterns between the sexes. It is interesting to note that in Saskatchewan the level of education of the fathers of leavers tended to be lower than the level of education for the mothers of leavers (Cipywnyk et al., 1983; Macdonald, 1987).

In a Saskatchewan study (Macdonald, 1987), there was no significant difference between the female leavers and persisters in their grade point averages. Evidently, in this particular sample, academically competent females had decided to leave school. Poole and Low (1982) also found that their male dropouts tended to have low academic potential, whereas their female dropouts had high academic abilities.

Poole and Low (1982) found that male and female students show evidence of different expectations for life, self, and school success. Girls, in particular, lacked confidence even though they were better academically than the boys. The males tended to have unrealistically high expectations of future success in spite of their lower ability/achievement. As noted previously, female dropouts do not earn

as much as their male counterparts over their lifetimes, nor do they fare as well as the males in gaining employment.

Dryfoos (1983), Roosa (1985), and Cipywnyk et al. (1983) also pointed out that education/training programs for pregnant dropouts were few in number and inadequate in relation to counselling, support services, and infant care at school. Since availability of child care is an important aid in school return of young mothers (Chilman, 1980), support services and facilities in this area should be expanded.

Summary

The diversity of characteristics of the early school leaver has become apparent from the previous sections.

The three areas of characteristics reviewed — family/background, personal, and school-related — contribute in varying degrees to the early school leaving phenomenon.

Low socioeconomic status, level of parental involvement, and low educational aspirations by the leaver and his/her family tend to be the most important influences in family and background that relate to the process of leaving school early.

The leaver's personality characteristics are manifested in many ways, i.e., low self-esteem, delinquent behaviors, and an external locus of control. The fact that only 25 to 50 percent of the variance in achievement is accounted for by intellectual ability (Minton & Schneider, 1980) highlights the importance of the intervening personality and motivational characteristics of the leavers. This is particularly true of the intellectually capable leaver.

There appears to be a differential experience in the schooling process for males and females. Attention to the implications of these findings may help educators to reduce the male dropout rate, particularly in rural areas, and to keep capable females in school. To help male and female potential leavers, schools will need to address a variety of motivational, organizational, and program dimensions.

School-related characteristics of leavers involve poor academic performance and achievement, dissatisfaction with school, low academic self-concept, and being overage (due to grade retention). Low grade point averages, poor reading ability, truancy, low educational aspirations, and discipline problems appear to be some of the outcomes of these characteristics.

In Saskatchewan, high alienation and low academic self-concept were reported to be the major differences between leavers and persisters (Macdonald, 1987). Providing these students with a less alienating school environment involves emphasis on successful academic experiences, student choice(s), development of positive self-concept, relevant realistic goals/programs of study, and academic/personal counselling and support.

A fundamental mismatch between the individual and the educational structure appears to be one of the primary causes for dropping out of school. A complex set of factors work together to create personal and academic limitations which make it difficult for certain students to succeed in the kinds of schools and programs that are provided for them.

REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT

Overview

The reasons for leaving school prematurely are complex, involving a combination of many factors. The dropouts report a variety of reasons for leaving school early. The main reason seems to be related to dissatisfaction with school. This reason may encompass an array of possibilities including: dislike of teacher(s)/subject(s), low grades, too many rules, not enough rules, disinterest, perceived irrelevant courses, boring classes, discipline problems, too much homework, sense of alienation, impersonal atmosphere, etc.

Ekstrom et al. (1986) and Wehlage and Rutter (1986) in their analyses of 2,000 American dropouts in *The High School and Beyond Study* outlined the major reasons reported by the leavers for dropping out of school.

The percentages of leavers and their reasons for leaving early are as follows:^{*}

- 33 percent disliked school;
- 33 percent had poor grades;
- 15 percent could not get along with teacher(s) (21 percent male, 9 percent female);
- 10 percent were expelled or suspended (13 percent male, 5 percent female);

* Percentages add up to more than 100 percent as leavers often cited more than one reason for leaving

- 19 percent were offered a job (27 percent males, 11 percent females);
- 11 percent helped support family;
- 18 percent were getting married (7 percent males, 31 percent females);
and
- 23 percent had become pregnant (11 percent of total sample).

These studies suggest that more than one third of the dropouts leave school because they do not achieve in school and/or because they are alienated from school. These results are similar to those reported in other major American studies (Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1979; Rumberger, 1987). Wehlage (1986) reports that the leavers from *The High School and Beyond Study* perceived the teachers as disinterested and the school's discipline system as unfair and/or ineffective. Similar results were found in Saskatchewan (Cipywnyk et al., 1983).

Canadian studies showed even higher percentages involving school-related reasons for leaving school early. In an Ontario study (Warren & King, 1979), 44 percent of the reasons for dropping out were categorized as school-related and 22 percent as related to personal factors. Recent research completed in Ontario as part of Radwanski's (1987) study for the Ministry of Education on *The Relevance of Education and the Issue of Dropouts* indicates that 43 to 45 percent of Ontario leavers dropped out because of school-related reasons, 19 to 23 percent for personal reasons, and 27 to 29 percent for work-related reasons (Decima Research, 1987; Goldfarb Consultants, 1987).

As the Goldfarb Consultants (1987) research points out:

Work, for the dropout, means money and hence independence, direct feedback, and tangible and intangible rewards for a job adequately done. The work place invites, where the school room disinvites. (p. 96)

This statement illustrates the apparent attractiveness of work that induces some students to leave their unsuccessful school experiences behind them and move into the adult world of work.

According to the 1983 Saskatchewan study, leavers cited school-related reasons for leaving early, with financial or economic reasons accounting for only 21.6 percent of the responses. Sixty-seven percent either had a job or were going to look for employment. Dissatisfaction with school appears to be the major motivating factor for Saskatchewan youth who leave school (Cipywnyk et al., 1983).

Summary

The cyclical effect of poor achievement (due in part to limited ability or perhaps low basic skills in reading/math), coupled with limited family support/encouragement, may contribute to lack of motivation, which, in turn, precipitates or enhances feelings of low self-esteem (or low academic self-concept) and alienation from school. Ultimately, the cycle may culminate in the act of leaving school. The diversity of reasons offered by the dropouts as to why they left school and the multidimensionality of the leaving process nullifies any hope of a simple solution. Personal, family/background, and school factors are interwoven into complex interaction within the community and society.

From an institutional perspective, the dropout characteristics previously described suggest that there is a serious problem with the holding power of school for some youth. It may be that, given the negative attitudes and behaviors sometimes exhibited by dropouts, they are more difficult to reach and teach. The school, however, has no less of a mandate to do its best to provide all the schooling such children can profitably use.

As University of Wisconsin researchers, Wehlage and Rutter (1986), concluded:

If one comes from a low socio-economic status background, which may signify various forms of family stress or instability, and if one is consistently discouraged by the school because of signals about academic inadequacies and failures, and if one perceives little interest or caring on the part of teachers, and if one sees the institution's discipline system as both ineffective and unfair but one has serious encounters with that discipline system, then it is not unreasonable to expect such individuals to become alienated and lose their commitment to the goals of graduating from high school and pursuing more education. The process of becoming a dropout is complex, because the act of rejecting an institution as fundamental to the society as school must also be accompanied by the belief that the institution has rejected the person. (p. 385)

DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

In this section, the characteristics of effective dropout prevention programs are reviewed. It must be kept in mind, however, that no single strategy of early intervention, remediation, programming, or training can serve the entire heterogeneous at-risk population. Strategies adopted by school divisions must

be responsive to the different needs, abilities, motivations, and interests of the diverse groups within this population as well as the particular community involved.

Need for Early Intervention

In their comprehensive report, *Dropouts in America: Enough is Known for Action*, Hahn, Danzberger, and Lefkowitz (1987) make the following observation:

Whether one focuses on grades or basic skills abilities, dropouts are the classic "underachievers." Many do not see the value in homework, and all too many come from households where there is little support for homework or outside academic enrichments. If there is a bottom line in the dropout literature, it is that with early detection more students could have been helped. (p. 18)

The early school leaver has been shown to be a low achiever, (although a substantial proportion are of average or better intellectual ability), sometimes exhibiting social/personality adjustment difficulties. It seems reasonable to assume that, early in their school careers, diagnosis of learning problems (coupled with remediation) within a caring and supportive school environment would benefit these potential leavers. Ultimately, fewer students might choose to leave school if they were functioning more successfully.

The low self-esteem and low academic self-concept which characterize the early school leaver appear to develop during the elementary school years and predispose these potential dropouts (and some of their teachers) to expect lower academic achievement. Chapman and Boersma (1979) report that academic self-concept is formed relatively early, before the end of Grade 3, and stabilizes as patterns of success and failure in school are established.

Beck and Muia (1980), in their presentation of research findings on secondary school dropouts, proposed that dropout programs which focused upon the social dimensions (i.e., self-concept enhancement) of the educational environment in the early school years would produce the greatest benefits. This finding is similar to other studies recommending early intervention (Howard & Anderson, 1978; Pallas, 1986; Schulz, Toles, Rice, Brauer, & Harvey, 1986).

Throughout the literature on school leavers, dropout potential is associated with low reading skill. In a 1986 Chicago study, low reading achievement and being overage (due to grade retention) accounted for 80 percent of the predictable variation in student dropout rates (Schulz et al., 1986). The implications of this recent finding highlight the need for effective teaching of reading skills and also

the importance of the implementation of the goal of continuous progress as a long-term means of student retention.

It is interesting to note that the pattern of school dissatisfaction reported by the leavers in the Saskatchewan study (Cipywnyk et al., 1983) began in Grade 7. Thus, there is a need for early intervention strategies designed to improve and build positive academic self-concepts in potentially at-risk young students through successful school experiences.

Radwanski (1987) offers a relevant observation in his Ontario dropout research:

If large numbers of students arrive from elementary schools with serious deficits in knowledge or in reading/learning skills, even the most caring teachers are going to have difficulty helping them to cope with the high school program. (p. 105)

This statement further emphasizes the importance of early academic intervention at the elementary school level. The elementary school builds the foundation of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and motivation required for completion of high school.

Characteristics of Effective Dropout Programs/Strategies

Specific dropout prevention programs all entail identifying at-risk students and providing them with academic and/or personal support. In this section, a brief review of effective programs for potential leavers is provided.

Wehlage and Rutter (1986), in their review of effective alternate programs, stated that marginal students tend to respond positively to an environment that combines caring relationships, personalized teaching, and a high degree of program structure that has clear but attainable expectations.

In a major study of American high schools, Boyer (1983) also found that successful efforts in dropout prevention foster close relationships between a student and a teacher or counsellor — a mentor with high standards and clear goals who had gained the trust and confidence of the student.

The author of a United States government survey (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1986) concluded that the key ingredients in an effective dropout program include a caring and committed staff, a nonthreatening classroom environment, individualized instruction, a low student/teacher ratio, and flexibility in curriculum and school hours. To a lesser degree, the survey revealed that links with

social service agencies and local employers to coordinate job placement and training activities contribute to the success of these programs.

Mann (1986) discusses successful prevention strategies for potential leavers in a novel way. He describes effective programs as having the four C's — cash, care, computers, and coalitions — and emphasizes the need to link learning and earning (work experience). The second C, for concern and caring, involves developing relationships with students to promote individualized learning in a supportive atmosphere. Mentoring has proved to be an effective strategy. The third C, computers, must be coupled with care/concern. The use of computers, in this case, refers to instructional strategies, student management, and helping to predict early leavers. The fourth C, coalition, emphasizes the need for a community/parent/business support system to help fund programs as well as utilize the potential leavers within the employment sector while they are also learning at school.

Mentoring is a strategy also recommended by Radwanski (1987) in his Ontario study on dropouts. Peer tutoring/mentoring has also provided opportunities for students to be successful learners without massive restructuring of schools/programs (Annis, 1983; Chandler, 1980; Fogarty & Wang, 1982; Hendrickson, 1981; Lazerson, 1980; Sharan, 1980; Zey, 1984).

Radwanski (1987) also sees value in the teacher monitoring role which would help alienated youth feel that the high school is a less impersonal place. Monitoring teachers would be responsible for a certain number of students in relation to checking their academic/personal progress and concerns and initiating extra interventions when necessary.

In yet another American study, Mills (1984), summarized the characteristics of successful dropout prevention programs. He found that teachers who were most effective with high-risk youth were able to be creative, encouraging, respectful, empathic, and supportive of those students. These teachers made learning relevant.

Making the school experience relevant to dropout-prone youth can also be done through career exploration. The career components of the high school curriculum as well as individualized career testing can help the students to personalize the data about careers in relation to their own interests, goals, abilities, aptitudes, and values. Developing a realistic career goal may be of benefit to some students who would otherwise lack the persistence to complete their high school education.

In his article pertaining to the effects of raising educational standards and reducing the dropout rates, Hamilton (1986) cites four common characteristics of successful dropout-prevention programs:

- (a) They separate potential dropouts from other students; (b) they have strong vocational components; (c) they utilize out-of-classroom learning; and (d) they are intensive in the sense of being small, individualizing instruction, having low student-teacher ratios, and offering more counselling than ordinary schools. (p. 410)

Work experience programs in school and within the community have proven to be beneficial for retaining high-risk students. Vocational education programs coupled with support services provide opportunities for success, bolster self-esteem, and provide practical integration of real-life experiences with basic skill development in mathematics and language arts courses (Azcoitia & Viso, 1987).

Kent Anderson, a Saskatchewan teacher-therapist who works with dropout-prone and re-entry youth, advocates that the key to successful dropout prevention/re-entry is holistic planning. All aspects of the adolescent's life situation and academic experience must be considered, including parental/community agency support systems. Anderson (1984) states that counsellors should emphasize individualized academic plans with clear goals, continuous follow-up, and re-assessment of plans when necessary.

Pallas (1986) supports this view and believes that successful interventions designed to bring young people back to school need to be fashioned in light of leavers' past educational histories and present needs.

Summary

The need for adequate access to counselling services and support services is apparent at both elementary and secondary school levels if educators are to properly address the needs of those students who have academic and behavior difficulties related to social, familial, or personality problems. Peer counselling programs have proved to be beneficial to their schools by providing another avenue of communication to those youth who find it difficult to relate to teachers or other adults (Banks, 1987; Carr, 1983; Hahn et al., 1987).

Evaluation of Dropout Prevention Programs

Several researchers (Hahn et al., 1987; Rumberger, 1987; U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1986) have expressed concerns about the lack of evaluation of

dropout prevention programs. Mann (1986) confronts this problem and concludes:

What have we learned? First, people feel that too many students leave school without graduating. Second, students are impelled to do that by a wide range of circumstances. Third, practical improvements depend on knowing what was done to whom, *but* (a) virtually everything is being done and (b) at the delivery level, we cannot tell to whom and with what effect. Thus, we are doing a lot and learning a little about the multiple palliatives. (p. 313)

However, it is possible to utilize what we know about early school leavers and structure prevention programs based on current knowledge about their characteristics and some successful dropout prevention measures despite evaluative shortcomings.

Second-Chance Programs

Despite the rather gloomy picture that has been presented of early school leavers, it is encouraging that some leavers do pursue further education after leaving school.

Rumberger (1987) cites several American studies that indicate an estimated 40 percent of leavers complete their General Education Diploma (GED) high school equivalency certificate or regular high school diploma. Thirty-eight percent of the dropouts in a 1980 study returned to complete their high school (Kolstad & Owings, 1986, Table 1). Also, a 1985 survey by Kirsch and Jungeblut (1986) revealed that 40 percent of the dropouts who studied for their GED received the diploma. Fourteen percent of the 2,000 leavers in *The High School and Beyond Study* went on to complete their GED (Ekstrom et al., 1986). Little is known about the social, economic, and educational consequences of obtaining high school graduation credentials outside of regular day school programs (Pallas, 1986).

In Canada, few studies have been done to determine the school returning rate of leavers. Radwanski's (1987) Ontario study cites that 14 to 18 percent of the dropouts subsequently reported completing their high school education (Decima Research, 1987; Goldfarb Consultants, 1987). In the Saskatchewan study by Cipywnyk et al. (1983), 71.4 percent of the leavers reported that they *planned* on returning to school at a later date. There has been no research to substantiate Saskatchewan rates of re-entry.

The concept of alternative schools is examined in many discussions of dropout prevention and re-entry programs. Some educators feel there is promise in

establishing alternative schools with at-risk students or returnees (Arnove & Strant, 1980; Gold, 1978; Hawkins & Wall, 1980; Whalen, 1985). In contrast, however, Foley (1982, 1984) and Hahn et al. (1987) pointed out that alternative schools work well for highly motivated former dropouts; they do not always work as well for others who are less motivated.

While there are many avenues for leavers to pursue in furthering their education in Saskatchewan (Hugie, 1984), such as regional colleges, the technical institute, GED, correspondence courses, and apprenticeship training, many early school leavers do not view these routes as viable for advancement for various academic or personal reasons. Also, due to the uneven geographical distribution of post-secondary/training programs, some students find it difficult to further their education (Hugie, 1984).

The "Decima Report" (for Ontario) states that:

The data are very clear on what should *not* be done. To simply allow students to drop out in the expectation that most of them will eventually return ... is clearly a false assumption. The *prevention* of dropping out is the only way to ensure that students will in fact complete high school. (Decima Research, 1987, p. 100)

It is *imperative* to reach students while they are accessible and still in the educational system.

Summary

Effective dropout prevention programs appear to focus on aspects of school which reduce alienation of the student and, simultaneously, promote academic skills and self-esteem.

A cohesive, integrated effort within the potential early school leaver's environment — personal, family, school, and community — is essential to a comprehensive dropout prevention strategy. Throughout these interventions runs the thread of effective communication.

At the community level, business sectors can accommodate work experience students and also be encouraged to participate in mentoring activities within the school (Zey, 1984). Community agencies such as employment, social, health, and welfare services should also be utilized by the school as additional support systems.

Parental support and cooperation gained through effective and consistent communication with the school (and other agencies) will positively affect student retention and, hopefully, promote the motivation to stay in school.

Within the school environment, effective dropout prevention strategies include: caring, concerned teachers; monitoring and mentoring teacher roles; peer counselling/tutoring; and a supportive atmosphere. The curriculum should be flexible, relevant, and individualized (with remedial/tutoring support). Consultants, counsellors, and other professionals within the school system should be involved when required. Work experience and vocational/career components of the curriculum are also of benefit as means of student retention for some students.

It should be noted that these programs should function as an individualized accommodation for certain students having difficulties staying in school. Good teachers who believe that all children can learn and who attempt to facilitate learning in an encouraging environment have been successful in helping these students in the past and will continue to do so in the future. In this regard, Radwanski (1987) provides educators with an astute observation:

A clearly conveyed sense of caring on the part of teachers, individualized help with problems of learning or coping, a purposeful and structured program, demanding and clearly-defined expectations — if those are the characteristics of programs that seem to help potential dropouts to stay in school — are they not indeed the characteristics of approaches that would help *all* students to obtain a high-quality and satisfying education? (p. 104)

Saskatchewan Dropout Prevention Initiatives

In a review of provincial policies on student retention, only Quebec and Newfoundland were found to have specific policies or guidelines which encouraged students to remain in school. Ontario is in the process of examining its policies on education and dropouts. Saskatchewan, at present, does not have a specific policy directed towards student retention; rather, student retention is an understanding implicit within the educational goals. Specific policy development and legislation encouraging student retention may promote further interest in keeping students in school.

The provincial government has responded financially to the needs of particular schools/school divisions in relation to student retention through the Education Development Fund. While the list of funded projects is too extensive for this report, dropout prevention programs include: peer counselling, alternative

school(s), various career exploration programs, alternative programming materials/personnel, vocational/work experience projects, re-entry programs, Native (field and case) workers, plus additional counselling and tutoring/remediation programs.

The Saskatchewan School Improvement Program is a particularly helpful approach in the development of long-term strategies to reduce alienation in potential leavers (and reluctant persisters). These programs emphasize staff collaboration, shared school goals, and ways of fostering positive school climate — all of which are essential elements for successful dropout prevention programs.

The province has utilized the media in an advertising campaign to promote staying in school. Pamphlet literature was also distributed to schools, families, and community agencies in the campaign.

Recent curriculum changes within the province will undoubtedly have implications for the potential leaver. While increasing the flexibility of the curriculum, these changes have increased the number of credits required for high school graduation. New programming will involve inservicing of teachers and continued professional development. Hopefully, these innovations will provide creative teachers with interesting materials and ideas with which to challenge their students.

Within the schools, the remediation/resource programs for elementary and secondary students have been a valuable asset in the individualization of instruction, diagnosis of learning difficulties, and provision of academic support for the identified at-risk student, especially in reading skills development.

Additional services such as consultants, counsellors, teacher aides, parent aides, and community agencies have been utilized as well. More counsellors, especially at the elementary level and in rural areas, would be a helpful dropout prevention strategy. Budget constraints have affected, to a certain degree, the availability of support services, particularly in rural areas. Improvement of student retention in rural schools is crucial considering the high dropout rates in rural Saskatchewan.

Efforts to address the needs of Native/Metis students include: hiring Native teachers and consultants, training educators through Native cultural inservicing, and developing parental/community support for student retention. Continued work in this area is encouraging and hopefully, will continue to reduce Native dropout rates.

Summary

Overall, Saskatchewan schools are attempting to provide multiple services/programs which appear to be in compliance with the characteristics of effective school dropout prevention. Why then, does one out of three students leave before completing high school?

Schools must continue in their attempts to create a positive climate and to provide opportunities for successful learning experiences that foster student self-esteem. Individualized programming, caring teachers, counselling, effective basic skills (reading), remediation, and holistic understanding of students' needs are additional components that facilitate positive school climate and reduce alienation. Parental and community support are vital in promoting educational aspirations and reducing student attrition.

Finally, it is imperative that the provincial government continue to provide guidance and direction in the area of dropout prevention programs through policy development regarding student retention, monitoring of the dropout rate, inservice funding, advertising, and the many other aspects that are involved with the reduction of early school leaving.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the current literature review related to the extent, predictors, and effective program characteristics involving the early school leaving phenomenon, a number of recommendations will be proposed. These recommendations will be offered in the hope of stimulating specific actions or strategies. The relevance of these suggestions must be evaluated by the reader in relation to the particular needs of the school, community, or other factors applicable to his/her situation. Figure 2 on page 33 depicts the outline of recommendations for early school leavers derived from this discussion paper.

1. The provincial government should consider adoption of a policy to encourage student retention. This incentive will promote awareness and concern in the area of early school leaving and hopefully mobilize various educational/community forces to reduce dropout rates. Specific actions could include:

- (a) A media advertising campaign utilizing current facts about dropout unemployment rates, reduced lifetime earnings, a less educated citizenry, the lower costs of keeping students in school compared to supporting them later in life. Emphasis could be placed on the various options/advantages of staying in school to graduate as well as the benefits of post-secondary education.
 - (b) Adequate funding should be made available for special projects proposed by schools/school divisions that relate to student retention measures. These requests may include: increased teaching personnel to lower student-teacher ratios and facilitate delivery of individualized basic skills, especially reading; increased counselling personnel to improve guidance services; professional development funding for various needs identified by the particular schools; or other approaches and strategies which address the goal of student retention.
- 2. Given the characteristics of potential early school leavers, efforts should be made to improve the academic achievement of those students who are low achievers. Those individuals who experience academic difficulties, particularly in reading and math skills, require remediation or tutoring services. Personal difficulties that interfere with academic progress shall be addressed through counselling and guidance services, which may include individual, group, career, and peer counselling.
- 3. In view of the importance of early intervention (at the elementary school level) and its impact on potential leavers, proactive measures to reduce school attrition may involve:
 - (a) Early diagnosis of reading problems/learning disabilities;
 - (b) Emphasis on effective instruction of basic skills especially in reading;
 - (c) Remediation in basic skills when necessary;
 - (d) Individualized educational programming/instruction;
 - (e) Access to elementary counselling services plus consultants and other support staff.
- 4. Considering the relationship between early school leaving and being overage (as a result of grade retention), school promotion policy should be reviewed and the goal of continuous progress be renewed and implemented.

5. Alienation from school appears to be a major school-leaving factor. Several strategies may be utilized, specifically:
 - (a) Building a positive school climate that promotes successful learning experiences;
 - (b) Improvement of teacher-pupil relationships;
 - (c) Implementation of program(s) specifically geared to the enhancement of self-concept;
 - (d) Holistic and humanistic approaches to teaching that accommodate cognitive, affective, and background and experiential aspects of the child's life;
 - (e) Encouragement of parental involvement/support of school activities as a means of engaging interest in their community school; and
 - (f) Attempting to personalize the high school experience. This process might include:
 - (i) orientation of new students before coming to the high school;
 - (ii) staying with the same class for some subjects, if scheduling allows;
 - (iii) special efforts to involve at-risk students in school activities; and
 - (iv) teachers acting as mentors (or advisors) to an assigned group of students through the year.

Mentoring has proven to be successful as a dropout prevention strategy. The mentor, as a positive adult role model, provides students with a supportive relationship. This person should have good rapport with young people and could be a teacher or person from the community.

6. Attempts should be made to maximize the facilitation of re-entry of leavers with flexibility of curriculum choices, hours, etc. Extra counselling support might be provided to facilitate and sustain the re-entry process.
7. In order to respond to the diversity of the potential leaver population, the provision of alternative programs, such as work experience, life skills, and vocational/technical programs, or various combinations of these programs, might provide certain students with the success and impetus they require to

further their education, in spite of some academic limitations or personal difficulties.

8. Attention should be given to the centralization and coordination of early school leaving data at the provincial level. A provincial attendance officer could facilitate coordination and collection of accurate data and disseminate the information to aid school divisions in their allocation of funds, personnel, budgeting, and other relevant factors involved with student retention.

CONCLUSION

The social, economic, and personal losses experienced by the early school leaver warrant serious consideration. Given what is known of the characteristics, background influences, and school behaviors of the potential leaver and the variety of preventative measures available to deal with these students, it is apparent that "enough is known for action" (Hahn et al., 1987).

Educators must renew their commitment to the goal of educating *all* children and make a concerted attempt to salvage the potential leavers of the future.

Figure 2

Effective program and policy options at the provincial, school division, school, and community levels

PROVINCIAL LEGISLATION

diverse population/needs		Shared Responsibility
Early School Leavers	characteristics/predictors	
E F F E C T I V E P R O G R A M S	- Policy encouraging student retention	Province
	- Funding: EDF, etc.	
	- Alternate programs i.e., Correspondence, Regional Colleges, Technical Institute, etc.	
	- Monitoring dropout rate; uniform definition	
	- Advertising	
	- School Improvement program	
	- Curriculum guidance/direction; inservicing, etc.	
	- Allocation of funding for student retention	School Division
	- Monitor dropout rates	
	- Professional development funds	
	- Personnel selection, i.e., special hiring of Native/Metis teachers	
- Special programs; i.e., work experience, careers, vocational/life skills programs, pregnant adolescents, etc.		
- Consultants/Support staff		
- Drug & alcohol awareness/education programs		
S T R A T E G I C S	- Monitor truancy; identify at-risk students; facilitate re-entry of leavers	School
	- Positive school climate	
	- Promote parental support/involvement	
	- Flexible/relevant curriculum/courses; provide special services (remediation, counselling, work experience, etc.)	
	- Emphasis on basic skills instruction especially reading	
	- Peer counselling/tutoring	
	- Promote drug and alcohol education/awareness programs	
	- Promote positive student-teacher relationship	Teacher
	- Facilitate parental involvement	
	- Develop communication skills	
	- "Holistic" approach to teaching individualized instruction	
- Emphasis on teaching of basic skills, especially reading	Family	
- Monitoring - mentoring roles		
- Utilize support services; professional development		
- Support value of education/student retention		
- Facilitate/enhance educational experiences by providing encouragement, etc.		
- Business sector/work experience programs		Community
- Mentoring activities		
- Other educational alternatives; i.e., Community College, etc.		
- Social and employment services; health/welfare agencies, etc.		
- Drug and alcohol awareness and programs, i.e., SADAC; PRIDE, etc.		

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